

Week Ending Friday, June 20, 1997

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the President's Advisory Board on Race and an Exchange With Reporters**

*June 13, 1997*

**The President.** I'd like to begin by thanking this distinguished group of Americans for their willingness to serve on an advisory board to me to examine the state of race relations in America over the next year, to participate in making sure that the American people have facts, not myths, upon which to base their judgments and proceed to launching a nationwide honest discussion that we hope will be replicated in every community in this country and that will lead to some specific recommendations for further actions on our part as we move forward.

I think this is the right time to do this, because there is not a major crisis engulfing the Nation that dominates the headlines every day. The economy is strong. Crime is down. Our position in the world is good. But if you look at where we are and where we're going, we will soon be, in the next few decades, a multiracial society in which no racial group is in a majority. And we are living in a world in which that gives us an enormous advantage in relating to other countries in the world since we have people from every country in the world here.

Already, we have 5 big school districts in America with children from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups; soon we'll have 12, within the next year or so. And also, if you look at the rest of the world, all the wonders of modern technology are being threatened by the rise of ethnic and racial and religious and tribal conflicts around the world. We'll be in a unique position to show people, not just tell people but show people, they don't have to give in to those darker impulses if we can create one America out of this incredible diversity we have.

So you all know this has been a big concern of mine for a long time, but I just believe

that this is the right time for us to try to prepare for the new century and to take this time to look at it, and I have a very great group of people here, and there are hundreds, perhaps even thousands more who would like to participate in this debate, and we intend to give them the chance to do it.

**State of Race Relations**

**Q.** How bad do you think race relations are in this country today? I mean, what are the real tensions?

**The President.** I think they're much better than they used to be, but I think there is still discrimination. I think there is still both illegal discrimination and discrimination that may not rise to the level of illegality but certainly undermines the quality of life and our ability to live and work together.

And I think there is still great disparity in real opportunity, particularly for racial minorities who are physically isolated from the rest of us in low-income areas with high crime rates and low rates of economic and educational opportunity.

I also believe there are glaringly different perceptions of the fairness of how various aspects of American society operate, most clearly the criminal justice system but a lot of other areas as well.

I also believe that we have not taken enough time to think about the implications of what it will mean when our racial questions are not primarily issues between African-Americans and white Americans, although still there is a lot of unfinished business there, but of the entire texture of American diversity.

So I think that there are problems. I think things are better than they used to be, but I think that we have a lot of work to do in order to be one America.

**Q.** Mr. President, we have an interesting phenomenon in that a lot of Americans work in integrated work environments, but they aren't friends. I mean, they are colleagues

at work, but they're not friends at home. They don't socialize together. They don't voluntarily associate with each other. Is there anything that you can do about this? Is there anything you should try to do about this?

**The President.** It's certainly nothing you can legislate, but I think that one of the things that I would hope that the board and I will be able to do is to show America examples where people are working together outside the workplace as friends to build their communities, and to demonstrate that in cases where that has occurred, not only are communities stronger and social problems reduced but the people involved are happier people.

I think that's one thing I hope we'll be able to talk about. It may be a little old-fashioned and Pollyanna, but I basically think that we'll all be happier as Americans if we know each other and we feel comfortable with each other and we're getting along together. I think that it will make—I think we'll have more fun. I think we'll feel better about ourselves, not just we'll feel like we're good or noble or anything, but we'll feel like we're doing what makes sense and what ought to be the better part of human nature.

#### ***President's Record on Civil Rights***

**Q.** Mr. President, given how you've been criticized in the past on how you selected an Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Lani Guinier, and how you've been criticized by your close friend Marian Wright Edelman on welfare reform and how she essentially said it would leave poor minority children out in the dust and also how you struggled to come to a position on affirmative action that brought some rather tense moments between you and the Congressional Black Caucus and, lastly, how you were criticized on being in Texas, giving a speech on race relations on the day of the Million Man March, how much credibility do you think you honestly bring to the issue of race relations, and how much do you honestly think you can accomplish in relation to your goals?

**The President.** I think I ought to congratulate you. In 30 seconds, you've probably got 100 percent of the criticisms that have been leveled against me.

**Q.** Oh, there's a new one today. The Speaker——

**Q.** Besides the Speaker saying that's—  
[laughter]——

**The President.** First of all, I was invited a long time ago to give that speech in Texas, and I think it was a very important speech. I've had—secondly, more importantly, anybody who looks at my entire public life can see that it's been dominated by three things: economics, education, and race.

If there is any issue I ought to have credibility on, it is this one, because it is a part of who I am and what I've done, and I don't feel the need to defend myself. I think all you have to do is look at the way I constitute my administration, look at the way that we've changed the Federal bench, and look at the policies I've advocated. And I'm very proud of the process through which we went to develop the affirmative action policy with Mr. Edley here, was a part of that, and I think we did it right. After all, we not only had to come up with a position, we had to come up with a position in a way that we could defend it against those who thought we were wrong and who were determined to undo it, and we wanted to give everybody a chance to be a part of it. So I'm rather proud of that.

And on the welfare issue, time will prove whether Marian Edelman is right or I am. That's all I can tell you. All I can tell you is, even before the welfare reform bill passed, we moved more people from welfare to work than at any time in American history, and the Council of Economic Advisers says that 36 percent of them—about 30 percent of them moved because of initiatives taken by States to help people move from welfare to work. We kept the guarantee for medical care; we kept the guarantee for nutrition for poor children; we kept the guarantee that the money had to be spent on poor people; we gave the States more money to spend on welfare than they would have today under the old system. They have 20 percent more money to spend on poor people today than they would have had if we hadn't changed the law—today. And we're going to get, under the budget agreement, \$3 billion more to create jobs for people who don't have them. So let's—give me a couple of years

to see whether—who is right on this. She was sincere and honest in her position, and I'm sincere and honest in mine, and time will see who was right.

### **Expected Results**

**Q.** Mr. President—[inaudible]—going to be worried that this is going to be all talk and no action. Are there going to be concrete proposals that are going to come out of this? In what areas?

**The President.** I expect there to be concrete proposals. I also wanted to say there will simultaneously be concrete proposals that will be debated in the context of the budget that will directly bear on this. For example, one of the things that troubles me about those in favor of getting rid of affirmative action is, I don't recall any of them coming up with any alternatives, nor do I hear any voices assuming some responsibility for the apparent resegregation of higher education in Texas and California and some places as a result of it.

So, yes, I think we are duty-bound to come up with some policy, but I also think we're duty-bound to try to mobilize the energies and the attention of the rest of America so that everybody can be a part of this.

### **California Proposition 209**

**Q.** Does this mean you will specifically denounce Proposition 209 tomorrow?

**The President.** I've already done that, but I will make my position on that issue clear again tomorrow.

### **Tax Programs for the Working Poor**

**Q.** I assume you've seen the Speaker's comment that he's looked at the advisory commission and assumes that it will come up with the—I think he said—same old, tired, liberal big Government proposals. Would you like to disabuse him of that impression?

**The President.** One of the things we did in 1993, which was not an old, tired, liberal, big Government proposal—Ronald Reagan said it was the best antipoverty program in American history with the earned-income tax credit—we doubled it in 1993 to help the working poor, to reward—here is another thing I wanted to—most minorities work for

a living; they are not on welfare. And there are a lot of people out there working, not making much money. So the earned-income tax credit says we're not going to tax people who work into poverty.

This new tax program that has been proposed by the Speaker's Ways and Means Committee would penalize the working poor and especially working poor mothers. So I would say that I'd be glad to have his advice, but this is a case where he needs to neaten up his own house a little bit and get those—if he's for work and empowerment and not the big Government solutions, then they ought to change that tax package and stop punishing the working poor.

### **Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Legislation**

**Q.** What did you think of the Republican leaders all voting against the disaster bill? Wasn't that odd?

**The President.** I'm just glad it passed. Mayor Owens, the mayor of Grand Forks—I visited out there in North Dakota—called me last night after I signed it and said how glad she was the people were going to get their aid, and that's all I have to say. This never should have been political, and I don't want the politics to continue, and I don't want to talk about victories or defeat here. People are going to get help; that's all that counts. We've got to go back to working on this budget and all these other issues.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:50 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Christopher Edley, codirector, The Civil Rights Project, and consultant to the President's Advisory Board on Race; Marian Wright Edelman, president, Children's Defense Fund; and Mayor Patricia Owens of Grand Forks, ND. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Executive Order 13050—President's Advisory Board on Race**

*June 13, 1997*

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the Federal